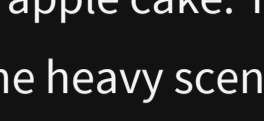


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LYRA sat next to Rhaenyra who, fortunately, demanded to be sat between her aunt and uncle. On her right seated Aemma who was instructing a handmaid to slice the apple cake. The grounds were still damp from yesterday's rains and the heavy scent of plant oils lingered in the slightly humid air.

They were served with fresh mint tea, except for Daemon who requested for wine. "Is it not too early in the morn for wine, cousin?" Aemma asked with a delicate sni .

"It is never too early or too late for wine, dear cousin," Daemon replied. "I would o er you some but I heard it is not good for the babe."

"Can I have a sip?" Rhaenyra asked impetuously.

"You are still too young, my love," Aemma admonished.

Daemon turned his attentions to Lyra who returned it with an icy glare that he was quickly growing accustomed to. "Would you like to join me, my soon to be lady wife? Or was last night's libations proved to be too much for you?"

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She narrowed her eyes at him. First of all, she wanted to know why he kept calling her that and secondly, she wanted no knowledge of what transpired in the last night.

↻

"No, thank you," Lyra merely responded.

Aemma cleared her throat and gestured to the apple cake that was being served. "I was told that this is a Dornish recipe. Can you tell the di erence?"

↻

Rhaenyra took a large bite, then made a face that was unbecoming of a little lady. "Why does it taste like this?"

↻

Lyra picked up a fork to have a taste for herself. Instantly, she was struck by an unfamiliar zest that was both sweet and citrusy, yet di erent. She had never experienced such a flavour before and had not the palate to distinguish it.

"Ah, it is a spice known as cardamom," Daemon explained. "It's quite common in Dorne and Essos."

"Oh, I did not know you were so well-versed in Dornish cuisine," Aemma remarked. "Wherever did you learn it from?"

Lyra turned to him with renewed interest and a smile that suggested she was going to feed him to his own dragon. "Yes, soon to be husband I wonder that too. Have you been to Dorne or Essos?"

Daemon cleared his throat then hastily took a sip of his wine, eyes darting between the two women. "No, I haven't had the pleasure but I have chanced upon some Dornishmen o ering a sweet or two in the city."

"I'm sure you've sampled plenty of pleasures in the city," Lyra commented and Daemon took an audible gulp of wine. Aemma looked quite pleased with how the morning was going but Daemon seemed to be regretting his decisions.

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Rhaenyra helped herself to another slice of cake. "It actually grows on you. I quite like it."

"Yes, me too," Daemon said while quickly shoving more cake into his mouth.

↻

Lyra took a sip of her tea as she studied him with an intent gaze. Daemon pointedly ignored her and now held Rhaenyra in light conversation about which dragon she should consider claiming. The larks continued to sing while dew drops collected in small puddles on the cobbled stone and so earth.

↻

"I had actually hoped," Aemma started a er a while, "to ask if the rumours were true? Did Daemon take you to fly on Caraxes?"

"Really?" Rhaenyra exclaimed in anticipation for an answer.

"Yes, it's true," Lyra responded.

"And how was it?" Aemma asked with a gleam in her eyes.

Lyra felt a tingle on the sides of her neck and she hesitated to describe the experience. She was afraid that her words would not paint an accurate enough portrait to give it justice. As a daughter of winter, there was no dragon blood running through her veins. Her one time encounter was more like a flight of fancy on the wings of an evanescent dream.

Yet she smiled and tried her best to explain, "It was like a taste of true freedom. Of all the things that could have been if the world were just a little bit kinder."

Aemma smiled wistfully. In truth, she was descended of Old Valyria herself. She was every bit a Targaryen save for name alone, but Aemma never claimed a dragon even though it was within her right to do so. Instead, she bonded herself to her wifely duties.

A lady-in-waiting approached Aemma to inform them that Rhaenyra's tutor had arrived. Rhaenyra pouted. "Already?" she complained.

"Aunt Lyra, Uncle Daemon, can we have cake together again next time, please?"

"Of course," Lyra assured her with a smile. She watched as the small princess ate the last piece of cake on her plate with a sorrowful frown. "I will go visit you a er your studies."

Rhaenyra's face lit up like the dawning sun, lavender eyes blooming with delight. "And you will tell me more about your flight on Caraxes?"

"As you wish," Lyra laughed at her avidity.

Aemma chuckled as she gathered Rhaenyra, hand resting upon the child's back. "Then I will see you later, Lyra." She turned her gaze to Daemon with a flash of warning. "Cousin, till next we meet."

Daemon nodded in acknowledgement of their departure. The handmaids trailed a er the two princesses as they crossed the gardens, then disappearing into the shade of the tower. Lyra looked down to her unfinished cake, having not the appetite for more. Instead, she sipped her tea.

"You are very fond of her," Daemon commented. His voice was so and musing. "Though I suppose she too is very fond of you."

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Lyra looked to him but stayed her tongue. She had always felt pity for Rhaenyra who seemed to be the only child in the keep. The little princess was so young but already seemed burdened by the consequences of her birth. To be surrounded by only adults and an army of servants seemed to be a rather lonesome existence.

Winterfell was cold and desolate, aye, but it lived and breathed. Lyra was never in want of company. Wherever she turned, there would always be a cousin or two to banter or fight with. Sometimes, she remembered endearingly, she wished they would crawl back into whichever hole they spawned from.

As if reading her thoughts, Daemon continued, "Maybe it would make you feel better if we produced a friend for dear Rhaenyra. One much closer to her age."

↻

The insinuation was not lost on Lyra. She finished the remainder of her tea and placed it down with an audible clink of displeasure. With one last glare at the crack of a smirk on his infuriating face, she gathered her hems and le the table without a word.

Her handmaiden hastened to follow but Daemon was swi er than the girl. He motioned for her to allow them privacy and the girl fell back at once. Lyra was already crossing the gardens, in the opposite direction of the tower, falling into habit of her routinely walks. Daemon caught up to her within the next heartbeat.

"Can I help you, my lord?" she questioned frigidly.

"There are many things that you can help me with, Lyra," he told her candidly, "but I merely desire your cheerful company today."

She sco ed at him. "Nothing ever stops at just mere desire with you, Daemon."

"Oh ho," he chuckled lowly with a playful smile. "You seem to know me so well already. I suppose last night had been quite enlightening for the both of us."

Lyra stopped abruptly, her heels digging into the dirt and stone underneath. She turned to look at him with furrowed brows of perplexity. "What?" The question slipped through her lips without forethought. There was no stray tendril of recollection that she could grasp onto for clarification.

"Ah, so you do not remember a er all," he stated nonchalantly. Daemon's face gave way slightly to shades of disappointment but he was not entirely unsurprised by the revelation.

"Remember what?" she asked, seemingly nonplussed.

Violet eyes darted around their vicinity before taking her wrist in hand. He pulled her behind a wall of trailing silver falls. Its pale-green leaves cascaded around them in a bed of foliage that hid them well from prying eyes.

Lyra felt the familiar flutter of her heart and the heady rush of nervous emotion. Her breath perished in her throat as he drew near and she felt his warmth against her hand which lay splayed against his chest. She turned her face away, lacking the courage to look him in the eyes. She wondered helplessly, had her dream been true or was it to be made reality?

"Perhaps I should refresh your memory?" Daemon asked, voice light and teasing in her ear.

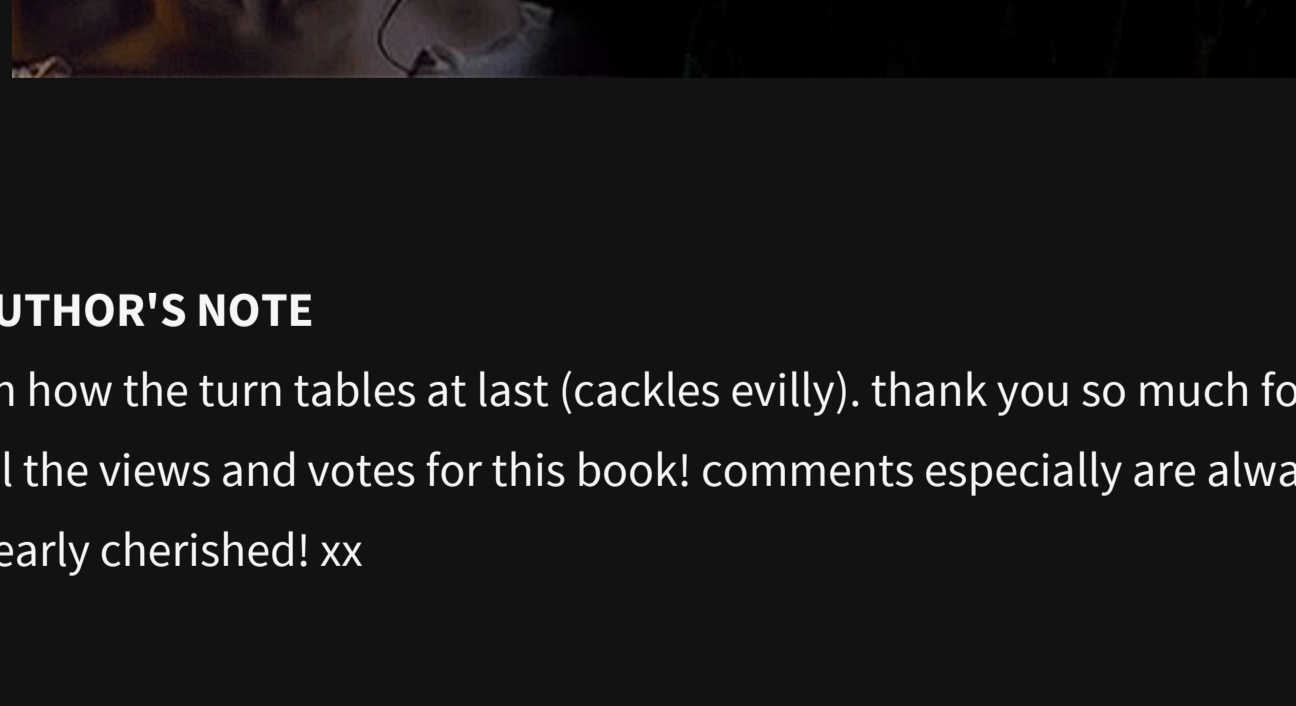
"Just tell me plainly," she said.

He hummed, pausing on second thought as he considered her carefully under a veiled gaze. Lyra finally looked at him out of curiosity, peering from beneath her lashes. There was a hidden mischief dancing behind his eyes of restrained mirth. She knew that whatever his diamond mind of blinding brilliance was plotting would not bode well for her. To her surprise, Daemon took a step back and relinquished his hold of her.

"Or perhaps I will just let you figure it out," he told her.

With his honey-laced laughter echoing in the wind, she watched him leave in utter astonishment.

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

oh how the turn tables at last (cackles evilly). thank you so much for all the views and votes for this book! comments especially are always dearly cherished! xx

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